DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 941 TM 840 254

AUTHOR	Stiggins, Richard J.
TITLE	Evaluating Students by Classroom Observation: Watching Students Grow. Reference & Resource Series.
INSTITUTION	National Education Association, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-8106-1525-8
PUB DATE	84
CONTRACT	400-80-0105
NOTE	33p.
AVAILABLE FROM	NEA Professional Library; PO Box 5079, West Haven, CT 06516 (Stock No. 1525-8, $5.50 ea.)
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Observation Techniques; Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; *Guides; Inservice Teacher Education; *Performance Tests; Preservice Teacher Education; Secondary School Teachers; Student Behavior; *Student Evaluation; Test Construction
IDENTIFIERS	Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

ABSTRACT

This is a guide to help teachers at all grade levels to improve the quality of their student assessments. It is designed for preservice and inservice teacher education to assist in conducting performance assessments to evaluate student learning. Performance assessment requires a student to analyze a problem, synthesize information, and attempt to apply acquired information to a new problem situation. It enables the teacher to measure a student's ability to transfer, not just recall, skills and knowledge. The basic aspects of a performance assessment are the decision situation, exercise, response, and rating. Performance assessments must be handled systematically to produce dependable and useful information about student achievement. The guide provides instructions for designing a performance test and guidelines for maximizing the quality of assessments. (DWH)

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Evaluating Students by Classroom Observation: Watching Students Grow

Richard J. Stiggins, Director
Center for Performance Assessment
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Reference & Resource Series

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Stiggins, Richard J.
Evaluating students by classroom observation.

(Reference & resource series)
1. Grading and marking (Students) 2. Examinations—Design and construction. 3. Observation (Educational method) I. Title. II. Series: Reference and resource series.
LB3060.37.S75 1984 371.2'7 83-23645
ISBN 0-8106-1525-8

CONTENTS

Foreword **4**
Preface **5**

Chapter 1. Introduction to Performance Assessment **7**

What Are Performance Assessments? 7
Comparing Performance Assessments with Other Assessments 8
Rationale for Training Guide 8

Chapter 2. Designing a Performance Test **10**

Preparing to Design the Performance Assessment 10
Step 1: Describe the Assessment Situation 10
Step 2: Plan the Test Exercise 12
Step 3: Describe the Performance to Be Evaluated 13
Step 4: Design a Plan for Rating and Recording Performance 15
Blueprint of a Performance Test 17

Chapter 3. Guidelines for Maximizing the Quality of Assessments **20**

Clarity of Purpose 20
Clarity of Communication 20
Freedom from Bias 20
Validity 21
Reliability 21
Economy of Assessment 21
Exercises 22
Scoring Procedures 22
Maximizing Quality of Spontaneous Assessments 22
Conclusion 23
Quality Control Checklist 24

Appendix. Completed Performance Test Blueprints **25**

FOREWORD

The National Education Association supports the ongoing testing and assessment of student progress. A student's classroom performance is the best indication of achievement and instructional needs. Sound judgments and decisions must be based not on a single pencil and paper test, but on many forms of assessment conducted over a period of time.

Teachers agree on the need for continuous and stringent assessments. Classroom instruction, conditioned as it is by results of day-to-day evaluations, must be well planned and conducted to assure reliable and helpful results both for students and educators.

Through the approaches discussed in this publication, the relationship among assessing, teaching, and learning is clearly drawn. Teachers will find *Evaluating Students by Classroom Observation* useful for planning a broad range of classroom evaluations. The exercises provide pre-service and practicing teachers an opportunity to examine ways in which assessment can be thoughtfully and purposefully developed. Through approaches that give in-depth information about students, teacher judgment is more accurate.

Sharon P. Robinson, Director
Instruction and Professional Development
National Education Association

PREFACE

This guide can help teachers at all grade levels improve the quality of their student assessments. Although teachers regularly develop and use a variety of assessment methods, this publication focuses on only one important test type, performance assessment—the observation and subjective rating of student behavior and products. Research conducted by the Center for Performance Assessment indicates that performance assessment is often the most useful tool available for evaluating day-to-day student learning.

There are a number of reasons why teachers should have a clear understanding of classroom performance assessment. First, most teachers use this form of assessment extensively to evaluate students' progress and determine the appropriateness of instructional activities. For example, a recent study of classroom testing practices by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh clearly illustrated this point. The researchers concluded that

> Standardized testing [published tests] is thought to play a major role in assessing student progress—either formatively, summatively, or both. Yet overwhelmingly, we found that teachers, when talking of how they assess their students, most frequently mention "observation." Clearly this favored teacher technique is quite different from the kind of information provided by standardized tests. Teacher preference, in effect, is for continuous movies, in color with sound, while a test score, or even a profile of scores, is more akin to a black-and-white photograph.*

Thus performance assessments have at least as much influence on student development as other test types. Yet most pre-service and in-service assessment training focuses on the development and use of teacher-made and published objective (e.g., multiple-choice, true/false) tests, to the exclusion of other important assessment strategies. This guide can fill that teacher preparation gap, serving as the basis for in-service or pre-service teacher training in testing.

Teachers also need to know about performance assessment because there are at least as many potential problems in developing and using performance tests as in other forms of assessment. Assessments can provide information that may result in incorrect decisions about students when—

- Test activities are not similar or standardized when standard conditions are required to create equal assessment opportunities for all students.
- Student responses are too brief to provide reliable information about student proficiency.
- Performance is rated inaccurately and inefficiently by teachers.
- Scoring procedures lack the detail needed to diagnose student needs when the purpose for assessment is diagnosis.

This guide overcomes these and other potential roadblocks to sound, effective performance assessment and thereby aids teachers in using performance assessment to maximum advantage.

*Salmon-Cox, Leslie. "Teachers and Standardized Achievement Tests: What's Really Happening?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1981, 631-34.

To reach this goal, the basics of performance assessments are introduced in a straightforward, step-by-step manner, guiding teachers through the development of a blueprint of a performance test related to their own specific assessment needs. This sequentially programmed training method has been used successfully in numerous workshops, including training sessions held in conjunction with the Annual Conference on Large-Scale Assessment of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a national conference on Future Directions and Assessment in Adult Education, the Iowa Conference on Student Assessment, and the convention of the Oregon Educational Research Association. Further, these materials have been successfully pilot tested as an individual study guide and as the basis for group workshops with teachers in the Portland, Oregon, public schools. Thanks to excellent feedback from participating teachers, I am confident that this training can enhance the quality and usefulness of performance assessment as a method for assessing student skills.

Many educators contributed to the development of this teacher's guide. Both Nancy Bridgeford and Jason Millman reviewed early drafts and provided insightful and constructive criticism. Nancy also provided valuable editorial suggestions, as did Vicki Spandel. Thanks to each of these people. Thanks are also due to Carol DeWitte for her patience in completing the many drafts required.

Finally, I would like to express appreciation to the members of the Portland Association of Teachers and the National Education Association for their assistance in pilot testing and reviewing this guide.

Richard J. Stiggins, Director
Center for Performance Assessment
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

As a teacher, your assessments of student growth and development are very important. They impact students in many ways. They influence not only how rapidly students learn, but more importantly, how they feel about themselves in relation to school achievement. Your assessments also impact the quality and efficiency of your instruction, differentiating material mastered by students from material you must reteach. Thus quality assessment can be a definite asset in your classroom. This guide will introduce you to many strategies for ensuring the quality of your measures of student achievement.

That introduction takes the form of a test development simulation. You are about to design an assessment of student achievement. But, unlike constructing a multiple-choice or true/false test, or administering a standardized test, you will neither write test items nor count items answered correctly. Rather, you will design an assessment that relies totally on your observation of and professional judgment about student performance; that is, you will design a performance assessment.

WHAT ARE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS?

Performance assessments require that you, the teacher, evaluate actual student behavior and/or student products. Performance assessments differ from objective tests in a number of ways. During a performance assessment, a student does more than select the right answer or fill in the blank. Instead, the student is asked to analyze a problem, synthesize information, and attempt to apply acquired information to a new problem situation. With performance assessment, the teacher has an important opportunity to test a student's ability to transfer, not just to recall, skills and knowledge.

Performance assessments take many forms. They can be formal, highly structured tests in which students complete specific exercises, and performance is rated according to clearly stated criteria, as in the following example:

> The high school English teacher develops an assessment to select students for a remedial writing program. Each student is asked to write two brief compositions. The writing samples are rated independently by two English teachers in terms of their clarity of expression, organization, and appropriate use of grammar. Students are selected on the basis of the results.

In other instances, performance assessments can be more casual, spontaneous assessments in which the teacher observes students during instruction to diagnose skills and plan activities. For example:

> While listening to students' oral reading, a third grade teacher notices a student consistently faltering over certain beginning sounds. The teacher makes a note of the problem for individual work.

Note that in both examples—formal and informal—the assessment consists of four basic parts: (1) a decision situation within which the assessment takes place (i.e., a basic reason for conducting the assessment); (2) a test activity or exercise to which the student must respond (e.g., a writing exercise and oral reading activity in the examples; (3) an actual student response (e.g., writing and reading performance); and (4) a rating or judgment about performance (e.g., rating components of writing and noticing reading difficulty). These, then, are the basic aspects of a performance assessment:

> *Decision Situation*—reason for the assessment; specifies the information you need
>
> *Exercise*—task given to student that requires performance; specifies what the student is to do
>
> *Response*—actual student performance; specifies the behavior or product evaluated
>
> *Rating*—evaluation of performance; specifies method used to judge performance.

Like all tests, performance assessments can vary widely in the information they provide and the manner in which they are used. For example, teachers may assess student performance for a range of reasons—from planning instruction to certifying skills for grading to selecting students for placement into advanced or remedial programs. Similarly, exercises can vary from highly structured, preplanned test activities to spontaneous, informal classroom observations. Student responses can

include any observable student behavior or any product that students create. And ratings of performance can range from formal scales, checklists, and grades to informal procedures, such as recording spontaneous impressions or making mental notes.

These variations in performance test form are illustrated in these additional examples of performance assessment. Here is a structured assessment:

> After completing a unit of instruction, a science teacher has each student conduct a simple experiment. The purpose is to certify mastery of the required knowledge and skills. Students first rate their own performance in terms of their success in setting up the experiment and their results. Then the teacher rates them on the same criteria.

Since this decision may have a major influence on a student's grade, it calls for a carefully planned assessment. A casual observation will not suffice here. If fair decisions are to be made, a carefully planned assessment of performance is essential.

However, in the following example, an informal assessment is both acceptable and appropriate:

> In analyzing and evaluating the impact of a unit on listening skills of students, a teacher observes students in small group activities. The teacher checks students for evidence of attentiveness and active listening, making anecdotal notes on student performance.

Clearly, in this example, crucial decisions affecting a student's future are not being made. As a result, preplanned and highly structured exercises, responses, and ratings are not necessary. Nevertheless, this informal assessment affects an important instructional decision for the teacher and calls for sound and accurate impressions of performance.

These few examples of performance assessments indicate the range of possible forms and uses of this method. But how do performance tests differ from other types of tests? That issue is examined next.

COMPARING PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS WITH OTHER ASSESSMENTS

Generally, teachers use two types of tests: objective tests and performance assessments. Objective tests include multiple-choice, true/false, or fill-in items. Some objective tests are published standardized tests, and some are developed by teachers themselves. Although both performance and objective tests have important instructional uses, such as diagnosing student needs, placing students in appropriate instructional programs, certifying specific competencies, grading and evaluating programs, they differ in form and often in purpose. First, consider these differences in form:

	Objective Test	Performance Test
Test Exercise	Multiple choice True/false Fill in blank Matching	*Formal*: exercise describes required performance *Informal*: observation during instruction event results in samples of performance
Response	Read, evaluate, select best answer, or fill in the blank	Plan, organize, construct the best answer by speaking, writing, or producing something
Scoring	Count correct items	Rate performance on a scale (e.g., 1 to 5) Check skills as present or absent Write anecdotal records
Sources of Inaccurate Assessment	Mismatch to course content Poorly written items Too few items Poor test conditions Lack of test-taking skills or test anxiety	Poor exercises Too few samples of performance Poor scoring procedures Inadequate rater training Biased attitude of raters

Regarding differences in purpose, when teachers diagnose student needs and evaluate their instruction, they tend to want as much detailed information as they can get. In these instances, performance assessments—observation of student behavior and/or products—provide a rich source of needed information. On the other hand, when concerned with grading, class placement, or districtwide curriculum decisions, schools may tend more toward objective tests than performance tests because of the concrete data they produce.

Thus, in actual practice, performance and objective tests tend to differ significantly in form and purpose. These differences notwithstanding, however, both types of tests have valuable roles to play in the classroom; if developed and used appropriately, each can contribute to a clearer understanding of student needs.

RATIONALE FOR TRAINING GUIDE

When asked to identify barriers to greater reliance on performance tests in the classroom, teachers sometimes cite parents', students', or administrators' demands for more "objective" evidence of achievement. They want more than subjective opinion; they want proof. Performance ratings are sometimes seen as too subjective. Given this attitude, it is useful to explore the perceived differences between the "objective" indicators and teacher ratings. Very simply, the key difference is that objective test information is seen as systematic while teacher ratings are seen as unsystematic, subjective, and therefore less dependable. Thus teachers may shy away from ratings in instances where they may have to defend their decisions.

Further analysis, however, shows that this preference for objective evidence on the part of parents and

others is not necessarily a rejection of teacher observational skill and/or professional judgment. Rather, it represents a misunderstanding of the value and methods of evaluating classroom performance. Therefore the key to successfully promoting a role for performance assessment is for the teacher to keep performance ratings from being or appearing to be guesses. Teachers can accomplish this by always being in a position to clearly describe all features of the performance test, including the reason for assessment, the exercises used, student responses, and performance rating procedures. In other words, they must treat performance assessments as systematically as possible. This kind of systematic assessment is believable to others. But more importantly, it produces dependable and useful information about student achievement. Those who have a vested interest in sound educational decisions are more likely to accept assessments of performance if those assessments are well designed, carefully applied, and clearly described. This training unit provides one way to achieve that goal.

CHAPTER 2

DESIGNING A PERFORMANCE TEST

As a teacher, you may already use performance assessments in some form. Although you may not label them as such or think of them as including a decision situation, an exercise, a response, and a rating method, observations and rating of student behavior or products are an important part of most regular classroom assessment. The goal of this chapter is to help you make your assessments of performance as systematic and accurate as possible, so that you and others will have maximum confidence in the appropriateness of the results.

This goal is accomplished by introducing you to a step-by-step sequence for (1) describing the decision situation, (2) designing the test activity, (3) describing the response, and (4) selecting the rating procedures. When the performance assessment results have a crucial implication for students, such as when a grade, promotion, or high school graduation rests in the balance, a high-quality, carefully structured assessment is essential. In all such cases, the complete planning sequence described here should be followed. However, the test design process includes many detailed steps. Thus it would be unrealistic to expect you to proceed through this entire sequence when you wish to measure performance in less formal contexts. But even when a casual or spontaneous assessment is possible, your familiarity with the developmental sequence described here will help you find ways to make student assessment as useful and accurate as possible.

The distinction between systematic, preplanned assessments and informal assessments is essential in understanding how to take full advantage of the potential of performance assessment. Both types have a major role to play. As you proceed through the design process that follows, you will be asked to design the prototype of a formal assessment to use in your classroom. But as you complete this process, remain aware of the fact that you should also be able to describe your informal, spontaneous observation and judgment in these same terms. Formal and informal assessments are compared again in Chapter 3, which deals with issues of ensuring test quality.

PREPARING TO DESIGN THE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

To begin the test design process, consider your classroom for a moment and identify an important example of performance that you have assessed or may wish to assess in the future. It may involve evaluating students' communication skills (writing, speaking, listening, or oral reading skills) or students' ability to produce a specific product (an art project or a typed letter), for example. In other words, identify a specific situation in which you either observe the student demonstrating a skill or evaluate a completed product. When you have selected such an assessment context, you are ready to begin the process of performance test design.

That process includes four steps. Each step contains a series of test design questions and several design alternatives for answering each question. Examples are given to help you understand your test design options, and helpful hints are included with each step to aid in making a design choice. A "Blueprint of a Performance Test" has been provided at the end of this chapter (see pages 17-19) for recording your choices. Be sure to use this blueprint as you design your assessment. To assist you in this activity, two completed test blueprints are provided in the Appendix of this guide.

Step 1: Describe the Assessment Situation

In designing a performance assessment, the first step is to specify the decision situation or reason for assessment; that is, you must specify how the test results will be used. Since this consideration strongly influences the kind of assessment developed, carefully describe your assessment situation by answering the four questions that follow.

A. What is the reason for assessment?

Table 1 specifies various possible reasons for assessment. Select the decision(s) from this table that your assessment should help you make. You may choose more than one, or you may wish to identify a situation not included in the table. The objective is to make the assessment purpose explicit (e.g., to diagnose skills, to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction). Enter your reason(s) for assessment on the blueprint form.

B. Who are the decisionmakers?

Assessment results may be used by different people—teachers, parents, school board members, administrators, students, and counselors—to make decisions. List the names and titles of individuals who will make decisions based on your assessment information. If you are the decision-

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF VARIOUS REASONS FOR ASSESSMENT

Assessment Context	Decision to be Made	Achievement Information Needed	Most Common Decisionmakers					
			Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Counselors	Taxpayers
Management Decisions								
Diagnosis	Decide students' strengths and weaknesses	Level of development of specific skills in individual student		X	X			
Placement	Match student to appropriate level of instruction	Information that places students on relevant knowledge or skill continuum		X	X	X	X	
Guidance and Counseling	Decide chances of success and satisfaction in various programs	Level of educational development of individual student relative to program requirements	X	X			X	
Selection Decisions								
Admission	Choose students to be admitted into program	Information that ranks students on relevant knowledge or skill continuum			X	X	X	
Certification	Determine mastery of specified knowledge or skills	Information reflecting individual student mastery of specified body of knowledge or set of skills			X	X		
Programmatic Decisions								
Survey assessment	Determine overall achievement level of students in program	Average achievement scores for groups of students				X		X
Formative program evaluation	Decide program components in need of modification	Intended outcomes attained and not attained by participating students			X	X		
Summative program evaluation	Determine if program is to be adopted, expanded, or discontinued	Program outcomes attained and not attained by participating students			X	X		X

maker, indicate this on the blueprint. If others are involved, so specify.

C. What knowledge and/or set of skills is the examinee expected to apply?

Specify in as much detail as possible the body of knowledge and/or set of skills to be demonstrated in the assessment. Later you will specify the performance task the student will complete to demonstrate the required knowledge or skills. But for now, simply describe the basis of your performance expectations. What do you expect the student to know or be able to do? Enter this on the blueprint.

D. Who are the students to be tested?

Describe the grade level, approximate number, and other relevant characteristics.

Step 2: Plan the Test Exercise

In any assessment, time and resources are limited. Resources commonly do not permit testing the student's proficiency in performing all relevant skills. Therefore most assessments are based on a sample of relevant tasks. Your second step is to describe the tasks you plan to use to sample student skills. To accomplish this:

- Describe the test activity.
- Determine whether it will be assessed formally or informally.
- Decide the number of performance samples needed.
- Determine who will supervise the assessment.

In Step 1, part C you described the knowledge or skills the student is to demonstrate (e.g., demonstrate the ability to think critically or to write an organized paragraph). In Step 2, you will describe the specific context and task(s) you will use to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate this proficiency.

A. Will you assess student performance by observing everyday activities in or outside the classroom, or by creating a specific test activity to measure performance? *Note*: Both can be used if you wish.

Option 1: You may use typical classroom event(s) to provide evidence of student skill.

Example: You may observe and evaluate students as they plan a group presentation, solve a word problem in math, or set up an experiment.

Option 2: You may design a specific test exercise to cause students to perform specific tasks so that you can evaluate performance.

Example: The fifth grade teacher uses a problem-solving simulation to observe and rate the problem-solving skills of each student.

- Helpful Hints

1. Informal observations of natural classroom activities provide an appropriate basis for an assessment if
   a. Those events are readily available, easy to use, and likely to produce the behavior you need to evaluate.
   b. Your resources are limited—it costs time (and perhaps money) to develop new test activities. Since normal classroom events occur whether an assessment is being conducted or not, they require no additional costs.
   c. Ability to apply knowledge or skills can be effectively measured in a natural setting.
   d. You wish to measure typical performance rather than test possible performance. A preplanned and highly structured test exercise may distort "typical" performance due to test anxiety or artificial circumstances of testing.
   e. The assessment task does not have to be identical for every student. Because teachers cannot observe all students at once, the performance evaluated at different times will be somewhat different for each student.
2. A preplanned, structured performance exercise should be used if
   a. Natural events are unlikely to produce an easy-to-observe, appropriate sample of behavior.
   b. You have resources (time, money, and ideas) to develop and evaluate the exercises.
   c. A standard testing situation is required to allow each student an opportunity to respond to the same test activity.

Make your choice, enter it on the blueprint, and provide a brief description of the nature of your classroom events or exercises.

B. How many assessment tasks or samples of performance will you need to accurately judge a student's skill?

Option 1: You may use one assessment exercise.

Example: Require one brief essay to

judge a student's general writing proficiency.

Option 2: You may use several exercises.

Example: Use three different writing activities to evaluate a student's ability to summarize information or argue persuasively.

Option 3: Or you may choose to use several assessment exercises over a period of time.

Example: Require writing in a journal throughout the school year to judge changes in writing proficiency.

- Helpful Hints

1. Gather as much evidence as the reason for assessment demands. Important decisions, such as whether or not to promote a student to the next grade, require enough information to be absolutely certain your decision is correct.
2. A single observation of performance can be undependable. Several samples conducted over time are usually needed to be confident of your assessment. Collect as much evidence as the time frame will permit. Indicate your choice of options on the blueprint, along with the reason for selecting the number of exercises.

Specify the number of exercises on the blueprint and indicate the reason for your choice.

C. Who will supervise or administer the assessment activities, you or the students?

Option 1: You may opt to supervise assessments yourself.

Example: The teacher observes and rates science students' ability to set up and conduct an experiment.

Option 2: You may allow students to administer their own assessment.

Example: Over a five-week period students rate their own listening performance in ten informal conversations.

- Helpful Hints

1. Use teacher-supervised events if
   a. The student has some vested interest in high performance (e.g., a grade rests in the balance) and the objectivity of the results must be assured.
   b. The exercises need to be identical for all students. You must ensure standardized conditions.
   c. You have sufficient time to observe and rate resulting performance.
   d. A skilled professional is needed to judge performance accurately.
2. Consider unsupervised exercises if
   a. Students have no reason to misrepresent their level of skill (nothing to gain).
   b. The activity need not be exactly the same (standard) for every student.
   c. Too much time is required for you to supervise each activity individually.
   d. A product results that can be evaluated later (e.g., a writing sample, a videotaped speech).

Consider your choices, select Option 1 or 2, and enter your choice on the blueprint. State briefly why you selected the option.

D. Provide a specific example of the activity or test exercise you plan to use to bring about the student's response.

How will you frame the problem for the student? Provide an example on the blueprint.

Step 3: Describe the Performance to Be Evaluated

In Step 1, you outlined the reason(s) for assessment, and in Step 2, you decided upon test exercises. Now your task is to describe the kind of student performance or response to be evaluated. Do so by answering the three questions that follow.

A. What kind of performance will you evaluate?

Option 1: You can observe and rate a process or behavior as it occurs.

Example: A kindergarten teacher observes and evaluates a student's interactions to judge social development.

Option 2: Or you may observe and evaluate a product developed by the student.

Example: An industrial arts teacher evaluates the quality of a woodworking project.

Remember: You may choose to evaluate both the behavior and the result.

- Helpful Hints

1. Rely on process or behavior ratings if
   a. The process is more important than any resulting product or there is no product (e.g., evaluation of motor skills in physical education).

b. The performance is to be conducted in a step-by-step manner and deviations are unacceptable (e.g., conducting a scientific experiment in a science laboratory).

c. You have time available to observe student behavior one-to-one as it is occurring.

2. Rely on product rating if

a. A tangible product results from the activity (e.g., a mechanical drawing or a sample of writing).

b. The quality of the product is more important than the way it was produced.

Select from your options and enter your choice on the blueprint, along with a brief description of the process or product to be assessed.

B. What specific aspects of performance will you evaluate?

List as specifically as possible the criteria for evaluating a student's performance. What characteristics of the process or product will you judge? For example, in a speech, you may judge content, organization, and presentation. Given the performance you are to evaluate, on what will you base your judgment?

Note: The quality and usefulness of a performance assessment are determined more by clearly defined criteria than by any other single factor. Therefore consider your answers carefully.

Example: The two blueprints in the Appendix include illustrations of performance criteria.

- Helpful Hints

1. Spell out important performance outcomes *prior* to the assessment. This will increase the quality and efficiency of your evaluations.

2. To rate a process, state the performance criteria in terms of observable behavior (i.e., actions that can be clearly seen and documented).

3. When evaluating products, be explicit in stating required attributes.

4. Carefully distinguish between performance criteria (attributes to be evaluated such as organization, content, mechanics in writing) and performance standards (levels of achievement or scores on those attributes). The issue of standards (acceptable or unacceptable performance) is addressed in Step 4 in the discussion of scoring procedures.

5. Make sure there is a match between the skill you want to teach and the criteria you choose to measure success. Attitude, class attendance, and amount of class participation are usually inappropriate criteria to use in judging whether a student can complete a specific task.

Specify your criteria in the space provided on the blueprint.

C. Will students whose performance is to be evaluated be aware that an assessment is to take place?

Option 1: You may opt for an open, public assessment.

Example: The teacher of a computer programming class asks students to write three programs, to make them operate, and to submit results for evaluation.

Option 2: Or you may conduct your assessment unobtrusively.

Example: The teacher of a computer programming class walks around the computer lab observing students operating terminals. Without announcing the evaluation, the teacher notes those students having difficulty with particular operations.

Note: All objective tests must be publicly conducted. Everyone knows an assessment is taking place. This is not necessary with performance tests. The possibility of unobtrusive assessment is a real strength of performance assessment.

- Helpful Hints

1. In some instances, there are important moral issues to be addressed in conducting unannounced evaluations. Essentially those who use unobtrusive evaluation must be sure they remain sensitive to the student's right to privacy. They must also be aware that students' motivation to perform can be influenced both positively and negatively by the awareness that an assessment is underway.

2. Conduct unannounced assessments when you are interested in learning how students typically perform. When you want to know what is the best students can do, it may be better to conduct an announced assessment.

3. For some students, any assessment causes debilitating anxiety. As a result, performance suffers and an invalid assessment results. If extreme anxiety is an issue, consider unobtrusive assessments.

Select from among your options and enter your choice on the blueprint. If you select unobtrusive assessment, state why.

Step 4: Design a Plan for Rating and Recording Performance

The quality of performance assessment is determined to a great extent by the quality of the scoring procedures used. Because performance assessment relies on subjective judgments rather than on a count of correct responses, it is necessary to use special care to be sure the assessment is carefully scored. To ensure quality, consider the four questions that follow.

A. How detailed a record of performance is needed?

Option 1: You may want a single overall proficiency score (holistic scoring).

Example: A writing sample is given a single score that reflects overall writing skill.

Option 2: Or you may wish to have performance broken down into components, with each part rated individually (analytical scoring).

Example: Third graders' oral reading skill is observed and evaluated in terms of sight vocabulary, fluency, and apparent anxiety.

- Helpful Hints

1. The scoring method must relate to the purpose of the assessment. Some testing purposes require detailed analytic information, while others require more general information on student performance.
   a. Holistic scores are appropriate for grading, grouping, and placement decisions.
   b. Analytical scores are often needed for diagnosis, certification of skill mastery, and evaluation of effectiveness of instructional treatments.
2. Consider the resources available to observe and rate performance. Analytical scoring requires a more in-depth examination of the performance and therefore more teacher time than holistic scoring.
3. Both holistic and analytical scoring may be used together in certain situations if two different kinds of information are needed. For example, you may evaluate overall performance for each student, and then analyze the reasons for poor performance among those with low scores.

Enter your choice on the blueprint together with a brief restatement of the purpose of your assessment.

B. Who will rate or evaluate performance?

Option 1: You, the teacher, can observe and rate student performance.

Option 2: Other teachers can observe and rate.

Option 3: Students can observe and rate each other's performance.

Option 4: Students can observe and rate their own performance.

- Helpful Hints

1. Use teacher ratings (Options 1 and 2) if
   a. Rating performance requires highly specialized knowledge that only trained teachers possess.
   b. The same set of standards must be applied uniformly to all ratings.
   c. The student has a vested interest in results (e.g., a grade rests in the balance) and may be perceived as having the opportunity to benefit unfairly from self-scoring.
   d. Resources (time) are available for the teacher to do the observations and ratings. If another teacher is to be used, time must be available for training that person to do the rating.
2. Consider peer or self ratings (Options 3 and 4) if
   a. Highly specialized knowledge is not needed to rate performance.
   b. Slight variations from rater to rater are acceptable in using the scoring criteria.
   c. Students have no vested interest in artificially inflating or deflating their performance ratings.
   d. Resources are limited—students represent a low-cost, effective scoring resource, and they can learn by critiquing themselves and others.
   e. Students can be trained to become objective evaluators and to avoid overly critical evaluations of self and others.
3. Whenever possible, consider using more than one rater. Combinations of teacher and self rating, for example, can yield more convincing information than can a single rater.

Select your rater(s) and enter them on the blueprint.

C. What method will be used to record performance assessment results?

Option 1: A checklist of attributes present or absent in the student's performance (e.g., characteristics of a good speech) can be used.

Option 2: Rating scales that report degrees of proficiency demonstrated by the performer (e.g., a letter grade or a 1 to 4 rating scale applied to an essay) can be used.

Option 3: Anecdotal records of important behaviors or products (e.g., written comments on qualities of written products or classroom participation) can be used.

Option 4: Mental notes and/or records of performance (e.g., making a mental note of a particular success or problem encountered by a student) can be used.

- Helpful Hints

1. Rating scales and checklists have the following advantages:
   a. They combine the observation with a judgment, resulting in an easy-to-interpret record.
   b. They can be developed for process evaluations (checklist of steps completed) as well as product evaluations (rating quality).
   c. They can be tailored to many different performance criteria.
   d. They provide a convenient frame of reference for comparing and interpreting student performance.
   e. Data can be recorded quickly.
2. Anecdotal records have the following advantages:
   a. They can be used to record either behavior or product information.
   b. Behavior is described as it occurs without judgment.
   c. Records can focus on unique events or behavior that may be overlooked with other rating schemes.
3. Rating scales can focus efficiently on many attributes of many students, while anecdotal records are best with a few students and a few significant traits.
4. Anecdotal records are time-consuming to gather and use. They are not meant for all occasions, nor for everyday use, nor for all students at once. But when a detailed record or a quick note is needed, they can serve well. Written or tape-recorded anecdotal records are always preferable to mental notes.
5. In using mental notes, important information can be forgotten or misinterpreted when attempting to remember the event. This can only be avoided by using written records. Write down that judgment in an anecdotal record or use a taperecorder. Do not try to remember key aspects of student performance!

Select your recording process on the blueprint.

D. How are the performance test results to be interpreted?

Option 1: You may compare each student's performance with that of other students (e.g., a group norm).

Example: Students are ranked on their ability to play a musical instrument to determine seating in the band.

Option 2: Or you can compare each student's performance with a preestablished standard of acceptable performance.

Example: Students demonstrate skill in ten specific speaking competencies in oral presentations.

- Helpful Hints

1. The way performance is interpreted relates to the reason for assessing performance. Some decisions require student-to-student comparisons, such as grouping, guidance, and placement decisions.
2. Other decisions require comparing each student with a standard. Those include diagnosing, certifying mastery, and evaluating instructional programs.
3. Both modes of interpretation with a specific performance test may be appropriate, depending on the range of decisions that are based on results. For instance, students may be ranked on overall performance, and poor performance may be reanalyzed to determine which skills were not mastered.

Describe your mode of interpretation on the blueprint and state why you selected that mode.

BLUEPRINT OF A PERFORMANCE TEST

I. Decision Situation

A. Reason(s) for Assessment

B. Decisionmakers

C. Knowledge/Skills to Be Assessed

D. Students to Be Assessed

2. Test Exercise

A. Nature of Event(s)

_____ Naturally occurring classroom event(s). Description: _____

_____

_____ Structured exercise(s) Description: _____

_____

B. Number of Exercises

_____ One exercise one time. Reason: _____

_____

_____ More than one exercise at one time. Reason: _____

_____

_____ More than one exercise over time. Reason: _____

_____

C. Exercise Administration

_____ Supervised by teacher. Reason: _____

_____

_____ Unsupervised (self-administered by student). Reason: _____

_____

D. Sample Exercise Description

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Performance to Be Evaluated

A. Forms of Performance

_____ Process rating. Describe: _____

_____

_____ Product rating. Describe: _____

_____

B. Specific Performance Criteria

_____

_____

_____

_____

C. Test Awareness

_____ Open, public assessment.

_____ Unobtrusive observation. Reason: _____

_____

4. Rating Procedures

A. Type of Score

_____ Holistic. Assessment purpose: _____

_____

_____ Analytical. Assessment purpose: _____

_____

B. Rater

_____ Teacher rates own students

_____ Other teacher

_____ Peer

_____ Self

C. Rating Method

_____ Checklist

_____ Rating scale

_____ Anecdotal record

_____ Mental note

D. Interpretation Plan

_____ Norm-referenced. Reason: _____

_____

_____ Criterion-referenced. Reason: _____

_____

CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR MAXIMIZING THE QUALITY OF ASSESSMENTS

The development and use of sound performance assessment requires knowledge, planning (as described in Chapter 2), and an awareness of the pitfalls common to sound assessment. This chapter offers a list of specific guidelines to aid in maximizing the quality and usefulness of both preplanned and informal performance assessments. These guidelines promote the following:

Clear reasons for assessment
Clear communication about assessment
Objectivity
Validity
Reliability
Economy of assessment

Although the research on the use of classroom performance assessment suggests that teachers adhere to some of the quality control strategies discussed, not all (or even most) teachers typically employ enough of these strategies to ensure the quality of their performance assessments. As you review the guidelines, evaluate your own quality control efforts by placing a check next to those you regularly follow.

CLARITY OF PURPOSE

The key to test quality, as noted earlier, is to realize that, without a clear purpose, appropriate assessment strategies cannot be selected. Keep these points in mind with respect to test purpose:

1. Know the decision to be made and the decision-maker before you start planning the assessment.
2. Clearly understand the skills that must be measured to achieve the purpose and select an assessment activity that provides appropriate and relevant information.
   a. If you wish to measure recall of facts and relationships, consider using an objective test, as it is a valid, reliable, and economical means of assessing knowledge acquisition.
   b If you wish to measure ability to apply information, to use a skill, or to produce a product, performance assessment is an excellent method.

CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION

Students are able to show you their best performance only if they understand the requirements of the assessment. If you fail to clearly communicate what is required, students may fail to perform adequately not because they are incapable, but because they are unaware of your expectations. Two ways to help students understand are as follows:

1. Clearly explain to students what is to be done and how it is to be done. Illustrate the dimensions of appropriate performance, then see if students can demonstrate them.
2. Promote clear understanding by making expectations clear prior to the assessment. Make clear and explicit the characteristics of sound performance (performance criteria) and the standards or levels to be attained.

FREEDOM FROM BIAS

The goal in any assessment is to be sure the result reflects student capabilities rather than the attitudes or idiosyncrasies of the individual who rates the performance. To reach this goal:

1. Avoid performance assessments that give one student an unfair advantage over another simply because of factors related to cultural background.
   a. Remain sensitive to the cultural perspectives of all students involved in assessment.
   b. Use performance exercises that all students understand; provide equal opportunities to all students.
   c. Remain aware of any tendency to overrate the performance of students from your own sex, ethnic, or racial group in relation to that of students from other groups.
2. Employ scoring procedures based on clear, explicit performance criteria, predefined scoring rules, and careful rater preparation (training) in observing.

3. Avoid using mental recordkeeping. Write down or tape-record notes and evaluative judgments.
4. Be aware of common classroom assessment problems:
   a. Avoid being influenced by prior knowledge of student performance in another area when rating a particular behavior—halo effects.
   b. Do not be influenced by irrelevant characteristics of the student (e.g., personality traits) in rating achievement.
   c. Be sure to use the entire rating scale. When extreme ratings are warranted, give them. Do not be drawn automatically to the middle of the scale when mid-range ratings are not justified.
5. Whenever possible, rate student performance "in the blind," i.e., without knowledge of the identity of the student whose product you are evaluating.

In planning and preparing classroom assessment, be certain to avoid all forms of bias.

VALIDITY

The validity of an assessment reflects the extent to which the measurement procedure actually provides information about the student attribute you intend to measure. One characteristic that is often associated with validity—freedom from bias—has already been discussed. To maximize the amount of relevant information derived from observations of performance, adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Be clear on the purpose(s) of assessment. The more important the purpose, the more certain you need to be of the accuracy of your judgments.
2. Be sure the behavior or product observed relates to the characteristic you wish to assess.
   a. Clearly define the characteristic to be evaluated.
   b. Specify differences in levels of proficiency on the rating scale. (Decide what adequate and inadequate performance means in terms of skills.)
3. Develop a wide variety of exercises to measure the same skill. Use different kinds of writing exercises, speaking tasks, product development problems. Allow the diversity of exercises to mirror the broad array of contexts in which students might use the skill in question.
4. In some cases, you can use objective tests and performance assessments to cross-check student capabilities. For example, both objective language usage tests and writing samples are capable of providing information on writing proficiency. Used in combination, they offer the economy of the objective test balanced with the richness of information provided by actual writing samples.
5. Conduct unobtrusive assessments in those cases where artificial test situations and/or extreme test anxiety may distort student performance.

RELIABILITY

The reliability of an assessment reflects the extent to which you can depend on the information provided. Dependable assessments provide consistent information. Different test exercises designed to assess the same trait should yield consistent scores for a given examinee. Ratings made by different scorers should also agree.

Many aspects of the assessment, its administration, and the student can interfere with obtaining reliable results. Inattention to any of the following can reduce the reliability of your assessments:

1. Undependable performance ratings can result from low-quality assessments. *Avoid* these effects by
   a. Stating clear purposes, specifying performance criteria, and using unambiguous exercises and response requirements.
   b. Gathering enough samples of appropriate performance to be confident in judging the student's level of skill.
   c. Scoring carefully and using explicit procedures and trained (qualified) raters.
2. Undependable results can occur from poor test administration practices. *Avoid* these effects by
   a. Minimizing distractions to the student during assessment.
   b. Providing for uniform exercises, response, and rating where needed.
3. Undependable results can be caused by characteristics of the student. Minimize these effects by
   a. Using interesting, challenging test activities that motivate the student to respond.
   b. Reducing test anxiety by providing practice and experience with the assessment activity.
   c. Acknowledging that students have good and bad days and repeating your observations over time to allow for this factor.

The more crucial the decision to be based on assessment results, the more important reliability becomes.

ECONOMY OF ASSESSMENT

When asked what, if anything, keeps teachers from using performance assessments frequently, they sometimes report that they have insufficient time to develop and conduct such assessments. This problem can be addressed, in part, by designing economical assessment activities and scoring procedures.

Exercises

Three specific strategies can be used to reduce the complexity and costs associated with developing test exercises:

1. When structured exercises are to be used in preplanned, systematic assessments, rely on inexpensive, readily available options such as written problem situations, role playing, small group activities. Complex and costly simulations are rarely necessary.
2. Conduct an efficient assessment. One sample of student performance (e.g., a single writing sample) is often insufficient to draw conclusions, but three or four may be enough. Carefully consider how much information is enough for your situation and do not exceed that amount. The more crucial the decision, the more performance samples you need. Be careful not to oversample, however.
3. Save creative, workable performance exercises for reuse with different classes or at a later time.

Scoring Procedures

Six ways to make scoring more efficient are as follows:

1. Whenever possible, judge performance on the basis of a product rather than a process. Observing students carrying out procedures one-to-one is time-consuming. Products can be rated more quickly.
2. Rely on holistic scoring whenever it is appropriate and it meets the purpose of testing. If you do not need an analysis of the subparts of performance, do not generate one. Do not waste time rating factors unrelated to the decision you must make.
3. Use concise checklists and rating scales when possible. These allow you to focus on the important traits and permit you to record performance more quickly than with anecdotal records and more dependably than with mental notes.
4. Specify clear, concise performance criteria; focus on important characteristics and disregard others.
5. Train and use volunteer raters *when possible*. Parents, aides, and others can be valuable resources in this respect. But you must (a) make rating criteria clear, (b) train raters very carefully, and (c) be careful not to rely on volunteers to fulfill the teacher's rating responsibilities.
6. Take advantage of peer and self rating when possible. This can be a valuable learning experience for students and it can free you to do other things.

MAXIMIZING QUALITY OF SPONTANEOUS ASSESSMENTS

The foregoing strategies for improving the quality of performance assessments deal predominantly with formal, preplanned assessments. But informal assessments of student performance—a very common form of classroom assessment—can also be improved by adhering to the guidelines presented. Informal, spontaneous observations of students provide an extremely important source of information for teachers in all subject areas. For example, in an oral reading group, the teacher notices a student having difficulty with certain beginning letters. In a science lab, the teacher identifies a student who is particularly adept at conducting experiments. An art teacher identifies emerging talent. All these events include observations of behavior or products as well as judgments about student development. Although exercises are neither preplanned nor highly structured, students' activities nontheless yield performance assessments, and decisions are based on results.

How can the quality of these informal assessments be ensured? Obviously the decisions to be made or the performance criteria cannot always be specified in advance, nor can the exercises and responses be carefully matched to the test purpose. Moreover, structured scoring procedures are usually out of the question. Yet these informal observations also need to be free from bias, valid, and reliable. How can this be accomplished? Here are some suggestions:

1. Understand how classroom circumstances may impact student performance. Be careful about making unjustified inferences or generalizations from judgments based on spontaneous observations. Be sure that the poorly performing student was focused on the activity and motivated to put forth a best effort. Similarly, check to be sure that the high-scoring student did not have some special advantage that accounted for superior performance.
2. Whenever possible, repeat or devise similar informal observations to see if judgments are consistent.
3. Check your judgments with other teachers.
4. Check your judgments with the student(s).
5. Minimize the chances of bias by
   a. Remaining sensitive to the cultural differences among students and the ways these differences may impact performance.
   b. Recording observation and judgment as soon as possible—not relying on memory.
   c. Remaining sensitive to the natural tendencies to let prior knowledge influence judgments, making judgments excessively strict or lenient, etc.; trying to be aware of your attitudes toward students and remaining objective.

Finally, as a general rule, if you need to be certain of freedom from bias, reliability, and validity, because a major decision rests in the balance, do not rely on spontaneous observations. Use structured performance assessment.

CONCLUSION

This brief guide has covered a great deal of information. It has defined and illustrated performance assessment, taken you through the process of designing an assessment, and suggested ways to maximize the quality and use of your performance assessments. To assist you in maximizing the quality of these assessments, a "Quality Control Checklist" follows. It lists each factor discussed in this chapter.

The guide began with the assumption, based on research in classroom assessment, that you already know a good deal about this type of assessment, even though you may not label it or subdivide it into component parts as has been done here. The goal has been to provide a coherent structure within which you may (a) more easily plan the assessments you need and (b) ensure the reliability and validity of your professional judgments. By taking advantage of this structure in planning and describing your assessments, your carefully supported professional judgments will be viewed as objective and accurate evidence of student development.

QUALITY CONTROL CHECKLIST

Check these factors to ensure quality performance assessments:

Reason for Assessment

_____ Specify the decision to be made and the decisionmaker.

_____ Measure the ability to use skills and knowledge.

Clarity of Communication

_____ Give clear task explanation.

_____ Make performance criteria and standards explicit.

Freedom from Bias

_____ Use tasks that provide equal opportunity for all students.

_____ Be sure that scoring procedures are explicit and raters are trained to use them.

_____ Avoid mental recordkeeping.

_____ Rate performance "in the blind" when possible.

Validity

_____ Clearly define characteristic to be measured.

_____ Clearly define levels of proficiency.

_____ Develop a variety of exercises where possible.

_____ Use traditional tests and performance assessment in combination.

Reliability

_____ Use carefully designed assessment procedures.

_____ Administer assessment carefully.

_____ Prepare the student for assessment.

Economy of Assessment

_____ Use economical assessment exercises.

_____ Use economical scoring procedures.

Maximizing Quality of Spontaneous Assessments

_____ Know the motivation behind performance.

_____ Repeat observation.

_____ Check opinions with others.

_____ Be sensitive to sources of potential bias.

APPENDIX

Completed Performance Test Blueprints

BLUEPRINT OF A PERFORMANCE TEST IN BIOLOGY*

I. Decision Situation

A. Reason(s) for Assessment

1. Diagnosis--to show mastery of the concept
2. Student evaluation--grades
3. Formative program evaluation--to assess my teaching of the concept

B. Decisionmakers

The teacher will be the decisionmaker.

C. Knowledge/Skills to Be Assessed

1. Concept of food chains
2. Relationships between organisms in a food chain
3. Knowledge of terms related to food chains

D. Students to Be Assessed

All students in my class (25 sixth grade boys and girls)

*Developed by Mike Mitchell, Terra Linda School, Beaverton, Oregon.

2. Test Exercise

A. Nature of Event(s)

____ Naturally occurring classroom event(s). Description: _____

_____

__X__ Structured exercise(s) Description: Students will construct a drawing showing a sample food chain.

B. Number of Exercises

__X__ One exercise one time. Reason: Sufficient for simple assessment of students' strengths and weaknesses.

____ More than one exercise at one time. Reason: _____

_____

____ More than one exercise over time. Reason: _____

_____

C. Exercise Administration

__X__ Supervised by teacher. Reason: Students have vested interest in grade. I will have time to rate; my skills may be necessary to accurately rate product.

____ Unsupervised (self-administered by student). Reason: _____

_____

D. Sample Exercise Description

Illustrate an example of a realistic food chain from a particular ecosystem of your choice. Include at least five organisms. Label each organism and also tell whether it is an omnivore, carnivore, herbivore, producer, and consumer.

_____

3. Performance to Be Evaluated

A. Forms of Performance

____ Process rating. Describe: _____

_____

__X__ Product rating. Describe: Illustration of a food chain

_____

B. Specific Performance Criteria

--Five organisms included

--Correct placement of organisms in food chain

--Correct labeling

--Correct representation

C. Test Awareness

X Open, public assessment.

___ Unobtrusive observation. Reason: _____

4. Rating Procedures

A. Type of Score

___ Holistic. Assessment purpose: _____

X Analytical. Assessment purpose: Diagnosis of mastery of concept

B. Rater

X Teacher rates own students

___ Other teacher

___ Peer

___ Self

C. Rating Method

___ Checklist

X Rating scale (letter grade)

___ Anecdotal record

___ Mental note

D. Interpretation Plan

___ Norm-referenced. Reason: _____

X Criterion-referenced. Reason: I have a preset standard of an acceptable product.

BLUEPRINT OF A PERFORMANCE TEST IN DRAMA*

I. Decision Situation

A. Reason(s) for Assessment

Certification--mastery of skills

Grading

B. Decisionmakers

I will make the decision (teacher).

C. Knowledge/Skills to Be Assessed

The student will select a prose work for oral interpretation, design an appropriate introduction, and present the piece to the class, demonstrating presentation skills covered in class.

The student will demonstrate skills discussed in class sessions:

--introductory development	--how to select material
--poise and stage presence	--vocal coloration
--enunciation	--physical handling of material
--eye contact	--facial expression

D. Students to Be Assessed

Junior high beginning drama course (mixed--grades 7, 8, and 9)

*Developed by Jewely Sandoz, Mt. View Junior High School, Beaverton, Oregon (Drama Teacher)

2. Test Exercise

A. Nature of Event(s)

____ Naturally occurring classroom event(s). Description: _____

_____

__X__ Structured exercise(s) Description: Students will be given a date to perform for the class.

B. Number of Exercises

____ One exercise one time. Reason: _____

_____

__X__ More than one exercise at one time. Reason: Students will have the opportunity to perform twice (for performance variations).

____ More than one exercise over time. Reason: _____

_____

C. Exercise Administration

__X__ Supervised by teacher. Reason: A grade will be recorded--needs professional assessment.

____ Unsupervised (self-administered by student). Reason: _____

_____

D. Sample Exercise Description

Students will be called up one at a time in front of the class. Each person will bring material on a hard backing. The piece will be introduced and then read aloud. Student will then return to seat. Teacher will conduct an oral evaluation by peers and will present student with a written critique sheet and a grade.

3. Performance to Be Evaluated

A. Forms of Performance

__X__ Process rating. Describe: Behavior during presentation will be evaluated.

_____

____ Product rating. Describe: _____

_____

B. Specific Performance Criteria

See criteria listed in "Oral Interpretation Evaluation Form" attached.

C. Test Awareness

X Open, public assessment.

___ Unobtrusive observation. Reason: ___

4. Rating Procedures

A. Type of Score

___ Holistic. Assessment purpose: ___

X Analytical. Assessment purpose: Each section of mastery can be individually examined.

B. Rater

X Teacher rates own students

___ Other teacher

X Peer (with oral discussion as explained in exercise description)

___ Self

C. Rating Method

___ Checklist

X Rating scale (attached)

___ Anecdotal record

___ Mental note

D. Interpretation Plan

___ Norm-referenced. Reason: ___

X Criterion-referenced. Reason: There are standards to meet.

Beginning Drama
Mrs. Sandoz

ORAL INTERPRETATION EVALUATION FORM

Name of Interpreter: _____

Date: _____

Title of Selection: _____

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
1. Appropriate choice of material				
2. Cutting of selection				
3. Script on hard backing				
4. Introduction				
5. Handling of script				
6. Volume				
7. Rate				
8. Articulation				
9. Pronunciation				
10. Dialogue and character development				
11. Eye contact				
12. Facial expression				
13. Sensory appeals/vocal coloration				
14. Climax communicated				
15. Responsive body posture				

Additional Comments and Overall Effectiveness:

Grade: _____